

Fresno, California



Accomplishments: White House Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) Initiative – June 2012



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Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) is a federal interagency collaboration that aims to build the foundation for economic transformation by increasing the capacity of Fresno city government to implement the Mayor's plans for revitalization and economic development. As of June 2012, we have made progress in advancing the City's goals in our focus areas.

Downtown Revitalization

- SC2 identified a non-federal resource and provided key technical assistance to the City of Fresno to develop a proposal selected by the American Architectural Foundation's Sustainable Cities Design Academy. A Fresno public-private team developed strategies to increase utilization of the Mariposa Corridor, which connects the proposed Fresno high speed rail station with downtown's Fulton Mall and a planned Bus Rapid Transit station.
- SC2 is supporting the City's goal to restore several critical transportation elements to reconnect an 18-square-block street grid in Downtown Fresno, which includes the Fulton Mall. SC2 facilitated environmental review coordination between the City of Fresno and the State of California's Transportation Department to avoid delays and miscommunication during the environmental review process.
- GSA negotiated a lease on behalf of the Social Security Administration to locate to Downtown Fresno. The new 15-year lease in the Fulton Mall will create an influx of about 4,300 patrons per month in the heart of the City's historic district.

Business Development

- Mayor Ashley Swearengin kicked off the current class of the SBA "e200" initiative designed to help increase growth opportunities for Fresno small businesses. SBA is paying the tuition of 17 local small business owners to take this highly acclaimed executive "mini-MBA" program.
- Small Business Administration, Minority Business Development Agency, and General Services Administration have partnered to design workshops and outreach events to encourage greater access for local firms to federal contracting and entrepreneurial programs.

Economic Development & Innovation

- SC2 provided technical assistance to the City to develop a proposal studying the feasibility of expanding Fresno's value-added food sector by developing an existing industrial area into a food business cluster.

High Speed Rail

- High Speed Rail will make Downtown Fresno a focal point in the region and help re-establish Fresno's downtown as the urban and economic hub of the San Joaquin Valley. SC2 has provided intensive technical assistance to inform the City's development of the Station Area Plan, which will function as a City strategy, policy and planning document, as well as a public information tool for the developer community and the community at large.

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- The SC2 team convened over 30 stakeholders and provided technical assistance to maximize high speed rail planning in Fresno and leverage existing resources. The SC2 team has organized, facilitated, and coordinated multiple concurrent Fresno planning efforts that will affect, and be affected by high speed rail planning.
- SC2 has provided technical assistance to the City so it may provide input on the design of the non-station portions of the high speed rail infrastructure. As a result, the City made an independent request to the California High Speed Rail Authority to fund professional design consultant services to develop tailored design guidelines for Fresno, and the Authority agreed to do so.

Transportation

- SC2 is working closely with the City to advance its first proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line. More than \$37 million of federal funding is now committed to the project. Early engagement by the SC2 team resulted in the proposed BRT line being rerouted through the heart of downtown, so as to directly touch the Fulton Mall and other key downtown sites.

Neighborhood Revitalization

- Due to the combined efforts of the Economic Development Corporation serving Fresno County, SC2, and the City of Fresno, a project was developed to secure an Americorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) Team in Fresno. The 8-member NCCC Team worked on neighborhood revitalization activities such as planting street trees and building a community garden in the Lowell Neighborhood for four weeks.
- SC2 provided technical assistance to develop a plan to expand revitalization efforts, like those applied in the Lowell Neighborhood, to up to five additional Fresno neighborhoods. SC2 helped bring together 13 public sector, non-profit, and philanthropic partners to collaborate on the plan.
- SC2 worked with the Department of Housing & Urban Affairs to secure targeted technical assistance for Fresno to assess two stalled affordable housing projects, supported by federal funding, and work with the City to develop options on a viable way forward.

Resource Management

- An analysis of the City's drinking water system, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, provided recommendations to improve the system's operational efficiency and water conservation efforts.

Homelessness

- The SC2 team coordinated with the City and other partners to place six Americorps VISTA, and Americorps VIP members for a full-time year of service to support SC2 work. One volunteer placement is with the City's Homeless Program assisting with the implementation, evaluation, and communication of housing services in support of the City's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.
- SC2 convened local stakeholders focused on Veterans homelessness. As a result, data between the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Public Housing Authority, and the City is being fully shared, and the Social Security Administration got engaged in ensuring disabled Veterans receive eligible benefits.